

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

### *Statement*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [9.57 pm]: I will take a few minutes of the time of the Council tonight to talk about a meeting that took place last week in my electorate. It was attended by only a small group of people but it was a very important and significant step for the Mandurah community. About 40 of us attended the hall of the Uniting Church. Some people were significant community leaders. John Hughes, City of Mandurah councillor for the coastal ward, and Darren Lee, City of Mandurah councillor for the east ward, were present. Coral Richards is well known in the community for her work with the arts fraternity in Mandurah as well as being closely connected with the Uniting Church; indeed, she provided the venue for the meeting. Peter Kane, who is leading the local rugby team, the Mandurah Pirates, on to great things, was present also. He is doing a fantastic job for the community. Some leaders from the union movement attended, including Will Tracey from the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and Ian Bray from the Maritime Union of Australia. However, most of the people there were ordinary workers and families from the community. They were there to make connections with each other. I suggest that they were there because they had drawn some connections of their own. That is what brought them into the hall for a couple of hours for a quite spirited and inspiring debate about the direction of the community in the Peel region.

It was the group's second meeting. The first meeting took place at the end of July and was instigated largely by our excellent lower house member, David Templeman, who had picked up a feeling in the community that some people were taking very strong exception to the lead given by the federal government and where it is taking us. They are concerned about the way the people who really care about and want to consolidate their communities are being undermined. One of Margaret Thatcher's more infamous observations was that there is no such thing as society; there are individual men and women and there are families, but there is no such thing as society. It seems to have been taken by John Howard's federal government as a bit of a headline statement. The people in the hall that night clearly saw that kind of sentiment reflecting much more than just a semantic argument about whether a community, a society, is just a collection of individuals. These people had a deep belief in the power of the community to make the connections that could affect the wellbeing of that community. I keep dwelling on the notion of connections, because what came out that night was that people are making connections between various things that I suspect the commonwealth government would rather they did not make connections between. They are drawing connections between things such as the extreme WorkChoices regime that the commonwealth government has put in place and the welfare-to-work measures. They are drawing connections between statistics that I am very glad are being increasingly talked about. There are about 300 000 overseas workers in Australia on section 457 visas, but there are also about 350 000 young, aspiring TAFE students who have been unable to find a place to study. People are making connections between the way in which the new WorkChoices system - which is a ridiculous name to call something that effectively removes the choices of a large number of working people - whittles away workers' pay and conditions and, at the same time, removes measures to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our community. For example, homeless people are now unable to claim a special allowance through Centrelink benefits for people who are classified as vulnerable. If homeless people are not vulnerable, I do not know who is.

Our community has a very clear understanding that the reality is that families are struggling. Despite the lavish promises to keep interest rates down that were made during the last federal election campaign by the conservative forces in this country, interest rates are going up. Child care costs for ordinary families have gone up by about 95 per cent over the past 10 years. The price of petrol has gone up by 90 per cent. The costs associated with education have gone up by 77 per cent. Dental care costs have gone up by 65 per cent. This is the reality that is hurting ordinary working families today, yet the federal government is willing to let people trade off their penalty rates for as little as 2c an hour. The reality is that the new federal industrial relations legislation means that ordinary workers are facing pay cuts, they are being forced to work longer hours, they are being forced to work more antisocial hours and weekend and night work, they are no longer protected by unfair dismissal provisions and they have no minimum wage protection. I ask the chamber: who will suffer most from moves such as that? It is patently obvious that the people who will suffer most and first will be the people who are employed on a casual basis, the people who work part time and the people who are minimum wage earners. Who are these people? They are predominantly women and young people.

The group that came together in the hall last week have now made a firm commitment to each other and their community to take this group forward and to increase its membership. They were people who wanted to make connections with each other so that we can start exposing some of the hidden agendas being run by the commonwealth government. They are people who got together to share their interests and to discover further areas of shared interests. They are people who believe in collective action. They are people who believe in their community. They are looking for social justice for everyone in the community. Our local MLA, David

Templeman, and I will be doing everything we can to make sure that that group grows and makes its agenda well known on the local radar in the Mandurah area.

*House adjourned at 10.05 pm*

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